



OP-ED BY DATCP SECRETARY BEN BRANCEL: State Budget Maintains Core Missions

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MADISON – A growing agriculture industry helps grow our state’s economy. That is what Governor Scott Walker emphasized when he spoke about his commitment to the state’s rural communities and farms in his Budget Address on February 20.

The Governor’s budget recommendations for the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) allow us to maintain our core missions for the benefit of our farmers, agricultural businesses and consumers. While difficult decisions needed to be made to fulfill a \$1.7 million permanent reduction in General Purpose Revenue, this budget ensures that DATCP can be fair, efficient and effective while working for Wisconsin’s future.

Fair

For years, the Agrichemical Management (ACM) fund and the Agricultural Chemical Cleanup (ACCP) fund were used to fulfill budget needs. The Governor’s budget recommendations will allow DATCP to move in the right direction to reduce the impact on these funds and maintain their fair use for years to come. We are making an effort to use the fees generated by farmers for only the use they were intended.

The Clean Sweep Program was established over two decades ago to provide financial assistance to counties and municipalities to collect and properly dispose of unwanted pesticides. This budget makes a one-time increase in funding for Clean Sweep grants to realign the timing of the contracts and ensure funds are available when contracts are made, making it fairer for counties and municipalities to count on.

Efficient

This budget will transfer 40 of 44.5 full-time positions, eliminating already vacant positions, and over \$5 million in funding from the Tank and Petroleum Testing program at the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DPS) to DATCP. Currently, DPS inspectors look at the quality of the fuel stored in tanks around the state while the DATCP weights and measures team inspects gas pumps for accuracy, making sure you get what you pay for. After the transfer to DATCP, all the inspectors will be cross trained to do both jobs, enhancing their efficiency and providing a greater service to Wisconsin’s consumers. This new structure will enable one person to make one stop to accomplish both inspections, instead of multiple persons stopping at the same business to do each inspection.

This summer, construction of DATCP’s Bureau of Lab Services facility will be completed creating increased efficiency with the state’s regulatory and forensic testing. This budget provides funding for the increased rent costs for the new facility, which will ultimately benefit agriculture statewide. The lab is connected to the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene to increase efficiencies between them, from sharing a loading dock to a linked ventilation system.

Effective

Wisconsin has a thriving dairy industry with a strong infrastructure of farmers and processors. In the Governor’s budget recommendation, he provides \$200,000 for a Dairy Processor Grant Program to provide technical services to the state’s dairy processors. If the legislature maintains the Governor’s request, our agency will collaborate with the entire dairy industry to determine how to get the biggest benefit out of each dollar spent.

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This program will complement the existing grants for dairy farmers to grow their milk production to 30 billion pounds annually by 2020. By ensuring the profitability and productivity of Wisconsin's farms and processors, they will be more effective in meeting the demands of the international marketplace.

For Wisconsin to be effective in the case of an animal health emergency, we need to have access to information on our state's livestock. This budget maintains \$250,000 in funding for our contract with the Wisconsin Livestock Identification Consortium to maintain the computer system and data for the premises registration program. This will allow the information to be available if needed for an animal health response.

In the Governor's capital budget, he requested half of the funding needed to upgrade the facilities used by World Dairy Expo, Midwest Horse Fair and other agricultural and livestock events at the Alliant Energy Center in Madison. Making those upgrades will ensure that World Dairy Expo remains strong in our state and maintains its status as the premier place for the world's dairy buyers to do business each year. Governor Walker also requested half of the funding for renovation of Babcock Hall on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus. Babcock Hall houses the Department of Food Science, and this addition will allow the Center for Dairy Research to expand its ability to provide research, technical support and outreach to the state's dairy industry.

Moving Forward

The Governor understands that agriculture is more than just a business in Wisconsin; it is a way of life. This budget reflects his commitment to the industry's future. These budget recommendations will help our agency continue to keep food safe, protect animal and plant health, meet our environmental obligations and protect consumers. These are DATCP's core responsibilities. This is our mission.

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